

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RANGOO 01957 140243Z

63

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

OES-03 INT-05 EB-07 COME-00 PA-01 PRS-01 USIA-06 IO-10

HEW-02 SCS-03 SCA-01 /072 W
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P 110935Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9936

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: TPHY PINT BM

SUBJ: EARTHQUAKE DAMAGE IN BURMA

REF: RANGOON 1906

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

1. GUB METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT REPORTS EARTHQUAKE WHICH STRUCK BURMA AT APPROXIMATELY 6:35 PM JULY 8 CENTERED AT LONGITUDE 93 DEGREES 12 MIN EAST AND LATITUDE 20 DEGREES 55 MIN NORTH. TREMORS LASTED UP TO THREE MINUTES AT CENTER WITH INTENSITY RECORDED AT 8.2 ON MODIFIED MERCALLI SCALE.

2. AS REPORTED REFTTEL, MINOR TREMORS FELT IN RANGOON AND MANDALAY BUT NO DAMAGE IN IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF EITHER CITY. HOWEVER, SEVERE DAMAGE REPORTED AT PAGAN, SITE OF ANCIENT BURMESE CAPITAL AND PRESENT DAY TOURIST ATTRACTION. PRESS CLAIMS ABOUT 90 PERCENT OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS IN AREA AFFECTED BY QUAKE. GUB DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF ARCHEOLOGY TERMS QUAKE AT PAGAN WORST IN 900 YEARS OF RECORDED HISTORY. RETURNING TOURISTS SAY SPIRES TOPPLED FROM
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PAGE 02 RANGOO 01957 140243Z

NEARLY ALL PAGODAS AND MANY INNER PASSAGES IN LARGER PAGODAS

COLLAPSED. DAMAGE APPEARED MOST SERIOUS TO THOSE STRUCTURES LOCATED NEAR BANK OF IRRAWADDY RIVER. BURMA ARMY MOVED IN QUICKLY TO PREVENT LOOTING OF SHRINES AND TEMPLES.

3. TOURIST HOTEL AT PAGAN NOT AFFECTED AND GUB TOURIST AGENCY REPORTS AREA WILL NOT BE CLOSED TO VISITORS; ALL SCHEDULED TOURS TO PAGAN GOING AHEAD AS PLANNED. THERE WERE NO DEATHS OR INJURIES AMONG U.S. OR OTHER FOREIGN VISITORS IN AREA AT TIME OF QUAKE. AS QUAKE CENTERED IN SPARSELY POPULATED REGION, NO MAJOR LOSS OF LIFE OR INJURY REPORTED AMONG BURMESE POPULATION; REPORTS SO FAR INDICATE ONLY ONE DEATH AND ONE MINOR INJURY.

4. NEARLY ALL OTHER AREAS OF CENTRAL BURMA AND ARAKAN STATE FELT QUAKE AND DAMAGE AT PALOKKU, 125 MILES NE OF PAGAN, MAINLY TO CITY'S PAGODA, ESTIMATED AT K3 (\$.5) MILLION. THREE PRODUCTION RIGS AT CHAUK OIL FIELD TOPPLED.

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2. IN COUNTRY SUCH AS BURMA WHOSE VERY DATE OF INDEPENDENCE SET BY ASTROLOGERS THIS NATURAL PHENOMENON IS NOT WITHOUT ITS MYTHICAL IMPLICATIONS. EARTHQUAKES, WHILE NOT UNCOMMON IN BURMA, HAPPEN RARELY ENOUGH THAT THEY EXCITE THE PUBLIC IMAGINATION AND THIS ONE CONSIDERED BAD OMEN FOR PRESENT REGIME. ACCORDING TO LOCAL GOSSIP, EARTHQUAKES NEVER OCCUR DURING MONSOON SEASON, AND FACT THAT THIS ONE DID IS CITED AS EVIDENCE THAT NE WIN MAY SOON LEAVE THE SCENE.

6. ANOTHER POPULAR RUMOR STATES THAT CRACKS HAVE APPEARED IN LARGE ROCKS OF MT. POPA, A SACRED MOUNTAIN FOR BURMA'S BUDDHIST POPULATION, ALLEGEDLY AN OMEN OF THE DEATH OF A KING OR A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT. WE KNOW OF NO SUCH TRADITION AND SUSPECT IT HAS BEEN INSTANTLY CREATED BY THE REGIMES OPPONENTS TO FIT THE SITUATION. IN ANY EVENT, STORIES HAVE WIDE CIRCULATION AND MAY BE BELIEVED EVEN AMONG TOP GUB OFFICIALS; QUAKE MAY HAVE MOMENTARILY "SHAKEN" CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESENT REGIME.

7. IN MORE PRACTICAL VEIN, WE BELIEVE THAT ONCE DAMAGE TO PAGAN ASSESSED, GUB MAY REQUEST INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE, PERHAPS THROUGH UNESCO, TO RESTORE THIS ANCIENT SITE.
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PAGE 03 RANGOO 01957 140243Z

HOWARTH

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Message Attributes

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